

VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 18 June 1970

TO: The Director

FROM: GACarver, Jr.

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

Appended per your request is a copy of the notes on Cambodia that I gave to Packard at our meeting on Monday, 15 June.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 5 June 1970

TO: The Director

FROM:

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

Per your request, attached in expanded outline format is the basic line of argument I took with Mr. McCone and have taken with others when discussing this subject.

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George A. Carver, Jr.

Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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15 JUN 1970

Notes on Background Matters Pertinent
to Current ARVN and U.S. Operations in Cambodia

I. BASIC CONTEXT - THE CHANGING WAR

A. Struggle in and for South Vietnam has gone through various developmental and evolutionary stages, each of which has involved struggle and military operations different in scale, style and scope. Main evolutionary stages were:

1. 1957-1959: Resumption of armed struggle, marked primarily by terrorism, subversion and small scale, essentially guerrilla type military operations.

a. In late 1956 or early 1957 Le Duan, who had been director of party operations in South Vietnam since 1952, was called back to Hanoi to assume Truong Chinh's former duties as Party First Secretary. (He got the title three years later, in 1960, and still has the job.) Decision to resume armed struggle -- and thus, in Bernard Fall's phrase, start the second Indochina war -- appears to have been made by the Politburo in early 1957, shortly after Le Duan's return to Hanoi and assumption of his present duties.

2. 1959-1963: War of national liberation. (Decision to escalate struggle to this level taken at Party Plenum in May 1959. Creation of NLF announced at Party Congress in September 1960.) VC develop company/battalion/regimental size units, serious infiltration of cadre via Laos and northeast Cambodia begun.

3. 1964-1967: Introduction of NVA units and evolution of big unit war. Decision to inject NVA taken at December 1963 Party Congress. NVA units begin appearing on battlefield in late 1964, early 1965. This created spring 1965 situation which led President Johnson to introduce U.S. troops. Hanoi countered with more NVA. Military activity spiraled upward.

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4. 1968: Year of the big attacks. In summer of 1967, Hanoi engaged in full dress strategy review. Decisions emerging therefrom produced massive asset commitment and the major Communist offensives: Tet 68 (the biggest), May 68 and August 68.

5. 1969-spring 1970: Devolution to harassment strategy. After the costly failures (in military terms) of the 1968 offensives, Hanoi shifted to a more cautious strategy of harassment, probing and lessened large scale attacks. This is the strategic wicket Hanoi is still on.

B. Changing strategies, plus changing situation on ground in South Vietnam -- influenced both by Communist strategy and by ebb and flow of Communist military fortunes -- posed Hanoi with varying logistic and support problems and requirements.

II. THE ROLE OF CAMBODIA

A. It is in above context that one should assess role Cambodia has played in Hanoi's plans, calculations and conduct of the war. Cambodia has been a factor in Hanoi's equation since as early as 1965-1966 (or even before, since northeast Cambodia has been used as a major infiltration route since the 1962/1963 era). Cambodia's importance to Hanoi's whole style of fighting, however, has increased by quantum jumps since mid-1968. Cambodia has become of major significance to Hanoi for three reasons. All three are important, but without denigrating any of them, they rank as follows in ascending order of importance.

1. A Source of Food and Other Supplies.

Over the recent years, particularly the past two years, Vietnamese Communist logisticians and "Rear Services" (i. e., supply and support) units have increasingly turned to Cambodia as a source of food (chiefly rice) and other supplies such as medicines. The procurement operations involved have been extensive but frequently informal and exceptionally difficult to quantify. Rice, for example, has been

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obtained by requisition or purchase from individual farmers or through informal arrangements with Cambodian village, district or provincial officials. Medicines and other supplies have been obtained by a variety of techniques including that of having them purchased by Rear Services cadre from pharmacies and shops in provincial Cambodian towns. Cambodian sources for this type of supply have been turned to not so much because of absolute unavailability in Vietnam (which, for example, produces more than enough rice to meet the needs of Communist forces) as for distribution requirements and problems faced by particular Vietnamese Communist units and command echelons. In many cases, it has simply been easier to procure what was needed from untroubled Cambodian sources than to attempt to move stores or stocks around in the increasingly hostile environment of South Vietnam.

2. A Source of Ordnance, Ammunition and Other Major Military Supplies.

From sometime in mid-1968 until early 1970, Cambodia constituted a major channel for the supply of arms, ammunition and other military equipment for Communist forces in South Vietnam, particularly forces in IV Corps, III Corps and lower II Corps.

a. The logistic support operation considered here involved the importation of supplies through the port of Sihanoukville with the active and witting collaboration of the Cambodian government and army and full knowledge of Norodom Sihanouk.

b. There has been a continuing debate between the Washington intelligence community (CIA, DIA and NSA) and MACV J-2 on the amount of supplies Communist forces in South Vietnam have received through this channel and the time span involved. MACV has believed that the Sihanoukville channel has been a major factor since about October 1966.

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The Washington community has felt that there is little hard evidence for serious or significant use of this Sihanoukville channel prior to mid-1968.

c. Some of the military supplies for Communist forces imported via Sihanoukville were not manifested as such, and others were co-mingled with weapons and ammunition shipments from bloc sources ostensibly consigned to the Cambodian army. VC/NVA supplies were separated from Cambodian stocks and diverted to Communist channels in witting collaboration with Cambodian army officers. The spongy nature of much of the evidence has not permitted precise quantification of the supplies obtained via this route. The "Ho Chi Minh Trail" network through Laos has always had the capacity to meet all Communist logistic needs in South Vietnam and, in our view, has always remained the primary logistic support channel. Sihanoukville's importance clearly increased during 1969, however, and the Sihanoukville route probably came to carry perhaps as much as half of the major military supplies earmarked for Communist forces in the southern part of South Vietnam.

d. Even though the Laos network was technically capable of meeting requirements, the ability to use Sihanoukville was clearly a major convenience for the Communists. As a glance at the map will demonstrate, supplies destined for Communist forces in their lower part of South Vietnam were obviously much easier to move by ship to Sihanoukville and thence by truck or barge to forward depots than to carry overland via the long and tortuous trail network through Laos. The convenience (even if not absolute necessity) of the Sihanoukville route became increasingly marked when the Communists began deploying NVA units into the Delta in the summer of 1969.

3. A Source of Sanctuary.

Over the last five and particularly over the past two years, Cambodia has become increasingly important to the Communist effort of a source of sanctuary and refuge.

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a. The Vietnamese Communists use a mode of logistic support for their military activities that was adopted in the 1940s and has never changed since. This mode, which is a hallmark of their whole style of fighting, involving pre-positioning in forward stockpiles all supplies deemed necessary for particular operations or campaigns. Ideally, when Communist troops are committed to action they move into their supplies, which are already sited near the target areas earmarked for attack. The supplies brought up during an operation are normally intended for the replenishment of stockpiles and not for direct issuance to troops in combat.

b. During the early and mid 1960s, the Communists developed rather elaborate and reasonably secure base areas within South Vietnam where they stored their strategic and tactical stockpiles. Over the past year or so, however, these base areas within South Vietnam itself have become less secure and increasingly vulnerable not only to aerial attacks but to ground sweeps by allied forces. Thus, as the Communists' ability to develop and maintain secure strategic stockpiles within South Vietnam itself diminished, they have perforce increasingly resorted to Cambodia for storing these vital supplies. This necessity, in turn, has led over the past few years to the development of an increasingly complex and elaborate system of base areas along the Vietnam/Cambodia frontier from the Laos border to the Mekong.

c. As the pattern of military struggle has evolved in South Vietnam over the past two years in a manner generally disadvantageous to Communist interests, sanctuaries in Cambodia have come to play an increasingly important role of a different type in Communist operations. This other role is also a function of the fact that no territory in South Vietnam itself -- including such formerly secure redoubts as the Do Xa, War Zones C and D and the U Minh -- is now immune to allied ground sweeps and aerial attack. Lacking secure real estate in South Vietnam, the Communists have developed an elaborate series of base and sanctuary

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areas along Cambodian side of the frontier to house major headquarters, hospitals, training sites, replacement depots and other similar facilities. Until the events that followed Sihanouk's deposition on 18 March 1970, these base areas were politically sacrosanct in a way that made them practically immune to any serious harassment.

d. These sanctuaries have come to be an essential element of Hanoi's whole present style of fighting the war. While these sanctuaries existed as such, Communist forces that found themselves too heavily engaged in Vietnam or taking casualties the Communist command considered unacceptable could simply repair back across the border and, by doing so, stop the casualty drain immediately. Thus the sanctuaries became an important safety valve for Hanoi, which could use and exploit them to exercise considerable control over activity and loss rates in South Vietnam. Battered or mauled units could be pulled back into Cambodia to rest, refit, pick up replacements and -- in almost perfect security -- be readied to sally forth and fight again at times and places of Hanoi's choosing.

e. The existence of these sanctuaries, particularly the ones along the lower III Corps and IV Corps borders, also had a major impact on the situation in South Vietnam. The Communists could (and did) securely mass large forces in them in close proximity to major populated areas of South Vietnam, thus posing an actual or latent threat to South Vietnam's internal security that no amount of progress in pacification or Vietnamization within South Vietnam itself could ever eradicate.

f. For all of the reasons outlined above, over the past two years the steadily expanding network of Communist sanctuaries and bases in Cambodia have become an essential instrument to the implementation of Hanoi's whole strategy.

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III. POSSIBLE IMPACT OF CURRENT CAMBODIAN OPERATIONS

A final determination of the probable impact of current Cambodian operations obviously cannot be made until the operations are completed and one sees the type of situation that evolves after their termination. Even at this stage, however, certain tentative conclusions can be drawn:

A. Current operations are unlikely to have much impact or effect on Communist use of Cambodia as a source of food and other such supplies acquired on the local economy. The administrative arrangements here involved are too diffuse and too localized to be seriously affected by Phnom Penh government policies. It is not realistic to expect current operations to prevent Communist forces from requisitioning or purchasing rice from individual farmers or through intimidating local officials.

B. The type of supply operation formerly carried on through the port of Sihanoukville simply cannot be carried out without the witting and active cooperation of a Phnom Penh government, willing to extend such cooperation and, almost equally important, willing to protest violation of its neutrality if any allied effort is made to crimp such an operation. Thus, so long as there continues to be a Cambodian government hostile to North Vietnam, the Sihanoukville route is effectively closed to Hanoi. As indicated above, the Laos route has at least the theoretical capability to handle the supply level formerly shipped through Sihanoukville, but even under the best of circumstances (for Hanoi) the time required for transmission will be considerably greater, the process cumbersome, and the inconvenience considerable.

C. The damage done the Communist capabilities by the supplies in Cambodian caches and stockpiles captured by the allies is very much a function of the proportion of stockpiled supplies captured more than the absolute quantity. If our estimates of the amount or supplies stockpiled are anywhere near accurate, the proportionate losses of food (52-88%) and ammunition (75-125%) are already considerable, the losses of weapons (9-15%) rather less so. Even a preliminary trial balance cannot really be meaningfully drawn in this area until current operations are completed.

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Assuming continued Soviet and Chinese aid at present levels, Hanoi will certainly have the raw capability to replace these lost supplies, but doing so will be a lengthy and arduous task. Given the North Vietnamese style of fighting (i.e., the tactical reliance on pre-positioned stockpiles outlined above), major stockpile losses will put a severe crimp in any contemplated major military operations in the near term future. In north Laos, the fact that most of the Communists' forward stockpiles were captured during friendly operations last summer appears to be a major reason why the Communist offensive, that got off to such a brisk start in February 1970, stalled dead in its tracks in early March. If the north Laos situation can be recreated on a larger scale in Cambodia, Communist operations in lower South Vietnam over at least the next few months should be severely hampered.

D. The impact of current operations on the sanctuary issue hinges very much on whether or not after 1 July (when U.S. forces have been withdrawn) the Communists have to cope with continued aerial harassment and the threat of future ground attacks. If not, then the Cambodian sanctuaries will probably soon resume their former role and utility. If Hanoi finds itself compelled to accept the fact that its Cambodian bases have permanently lost their sanctuary status, however, the Communists will have to make major strategic and tactical adjustments. In fact, under such circumstances Hanoi will have to develop a new style of fighting the war. We have great respect for the Vietnamese Communists' resiliency, determination and ingenuity, but the need to develop a new style of fighting would clearly pose them a very major problem to chew on.

DCI/SAVA/GACarver:taw:15June70

Orig. - David Packard

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